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Natimuk Economic and Social Plan Issues and Opportunities Paper

18 May 2022



Introduction

The Natimuk community in collaboration with Horsham Rural City Council are developing an Economic and Social Plan for the township. The aim is to create a forward-looking plan to improve the financial sustainability and liveability of the town.

The Natimuk Economic and Social Plan aims to set a shared community vision for change and document the aspirations and priorities of the community. As a place-based plan, it will focus on understanding the local needs, and unearthing local solutions whilst considering the unique attributes of the place. The Plan will allow the community and stakeholders to work in the same direction towards achieving the community vision.

The development of the Plan is being led by Horsham Rural City Council with the guidance of the Natimuk Community Reference Group. Projectura, a consultancy, have been appointed to support the Plan's development.

In early April 2022, Projectura visited Natimuk and met with a small group of people in the local community and with Council staff. The purpose of the meetings was to collect an initial understanding of strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the Natimuk community. The key points from these conversations were then tested with the Natimuk Community Reference Group. This paper summarises what was heard in those conversations.

Points within this paper will be tested more broadly with the Natimuk community in the next stage of engagement.



Natimuk is a small town 24km west of Horsham in the Wimmera region of Victoria. A number of other rural localities are located around the township and will be considered in the Social and Economic Plan for the area. These include Mitre, Noradjuha, Tooan, Lower Norton and Quantong.

The Natimuk township had a population of 514 people in the 2016 Census. The combined the surrounding rural localities had a population of 712 people. Key facts about the Natimuk and the surrounding rural localities include:

- The median age in Natimuk and the surrounding rural localities ranged between 42 and 51.
- Of the 2016 population 1.2% of the Natimuk township identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. In the rural localities surrounding Natimuk no-one identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- On average in Natimuk and the surrounding rural localities 8% of people have previously attended a tertiary institution.
- Between 2011-2016 the population of Natimuk township decreased by 22%.

The top three industries of employment for residents across the area are hospitals, mixed cropping and livestock farming and government administration.

Our identity

The Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples have remained connected to the land surrounding Natimuk for many thousands of years.¹ It is believed that the name Natimuk comes from the local Aboriginal word meaning 'little lake', a reference to Natimuk Lake which is located just north of the township.

European settlement for sheep grazing commenced close to Natimuk on Vectis station in the 1840's. Settlement closer to the existing township occurred when land in the area was taken up by Lutheran selectors from Germany in the 1870's.²

Natimuk still services surrounding cropping and sheep farming establishments. In the past 30 years the towns economy has also focused on tourism to service visitors to Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite), one of Australia's premier rock-climbing areas.

The town is rich in heritage buildings and community facilities. Natural features in and around Natimuk include Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) and Mitre Rock which rise sharply out of the Wimmera

Plain, a series of natural lakes including Natimuk Lake and the Natimuk creek.

The Natimuk community is diverse in their interests, with strong local interest in football, netball and sporting shooting, alongside an active arts and theatre scene. This diversity of interests has arisen due to the movement of people from outside the region into the small township, attracted by the rock climbing, natural features or arts and culture scene.

Our strengths

The Natimuk community has many strengths, including:

Natural attractions and events: Natural features such as Mt Arapiles (Dyurrite) and Natimuk Lake are attractions for the town. Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) is regarded as the best rock-climbing location in Australia. The bi-annual Nati Frinj Festival, and the climbing scene has shaped Natimuk as a nationally and internationally renowned tourism destination. Other events such as the agricultural show and farmers markets attract more local visitation.

Demographic and cultural diversity: The Natimuk community spans a wide range of ages and have many varied interests. Natimuk is an active community with interests across the arts, theatre, climbing, tourism, farming, and sports. The community takes pride in their commitment to volunteerism and cultural vibrancy.

Community connectivity: Community participation in local groups, events, projects and initiatives makes the small population of Natimuk a tightly woven and resilient community.

Community advocacy and volunteering: Natimuk residents are proactive and innovative. Community volunteerism and advocacy has resulted in many valuable community assets such as the Showgrounds precinct, community pizza oven, skate park, festivals, events and art installations.

Businesses and facilities: Locals value and support community businesses and facilities within Natimuk. Iconic spots include the showgrounds, pub, café, golf course, museums, sporting clubs like the Natimuk District Gymnastic Club, and the Natimuk Field and Game Club.

History and storytelling: Natimuk residents are proud of the history of their town. The connection of Traditional Owners with the landscape is recognised, as well as the European history that is embedded in sites such as the local cemetery, historic buildings and Natimuk Lake.

¹ 2022, Parks Victoria website.

² 2004, Sydney Morning Herald, Natimuk.

Our challenges

Shocks, challenges and issues within a town can disrupt a town's progress. Capturing and understanding what is affecting the progress and social functioning of town can assist with planning for its future. Challenges that were captured during the initial consultation include:

Tourism and economic sustainability: Many businesses in Natimuk rely on tourism. Concerns around the impacts of some climbing closures at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite), the town not being part of the silo trail and a lack of tourism promotion for the town have been raised as concerns. A bike path has also been built to Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) which is not widely promoted or used. These challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

Working with local government, agencies and the Land Council: Working with, having clear lines of communication and being consulted on issues by local government and agencies have been noted as challenges for the community. Establishing a relationship and communication with the Barenji Gadjin Land Council is also important to the community.

Water for Natimuk Lake: Water to enable Natimuk Lake to be used for recreational and environmental purposes is a challenge for the community.

Environmental challenges: Residents are concerned about potential pollution from the sewerage system and its effect on waterway health. Concerns also exist around the application of waste to land in Quantong by a Horsham manufacturer and the fragmentation of native vegetation across the landscape.

Conflicting community priorities: Finding consensus on community priorities and communication between community groups is a challenge for the town. Issues such as the use of the silo for painted artwork versus its use for projections, aerial dance and other activities is one of the issues where the community has a differing opinion.

Other challenges identified included:

- Filling job vacancies and accessible training within town
- Slowing population growth
- Unreliable and limited internet connectivity
- Increasing and maintaining participation in community matters
- Closing businesses and reduced access to goods and services
- High pressure on volunteerism.

Our opportunities

Opportunities that have been identified through initial consultations for the Natimuk community include:

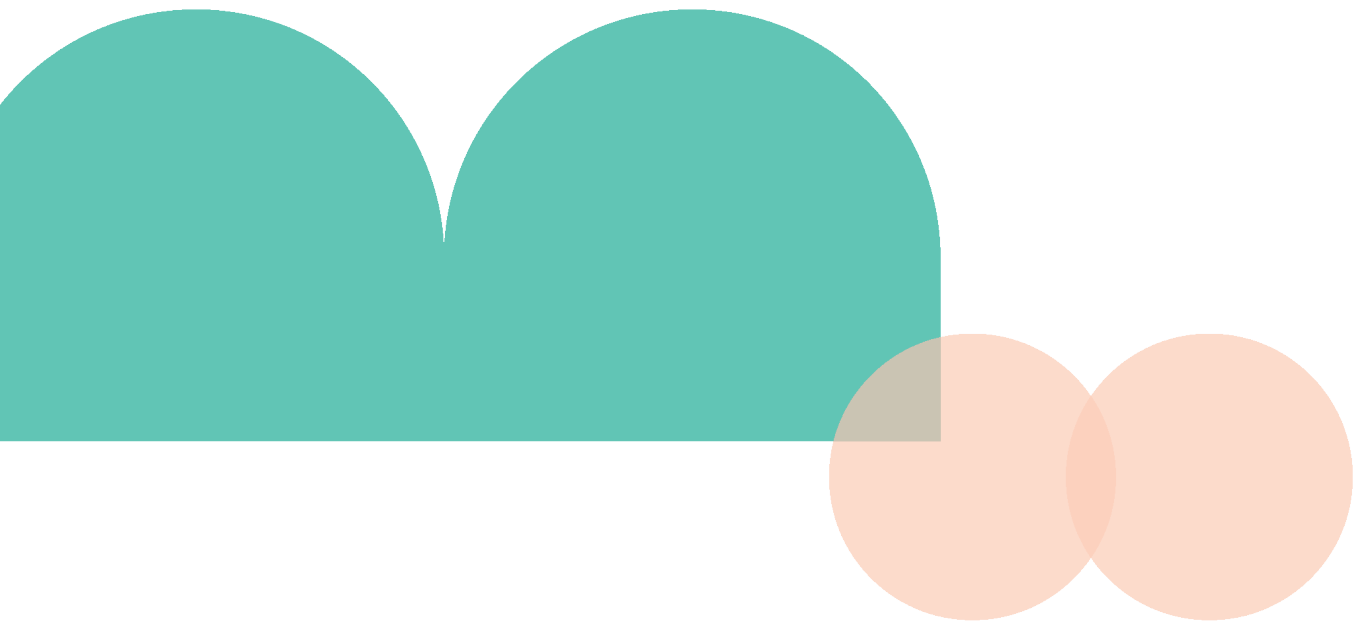
Tourism and economic sustainability: Increasing the tourism offering in and around Natimuk and the associated promotion of the town as a tourism destination. Initiatives such as climbing festivals, night-time silo projections, silo art, improved camping facilities and increased tourism promotion were all raised.

Infrastructure and services: Improved infrastructure is an opportunity for Natimuk, this includes access to fuel, improved footpaths and drainage, childcare, electric vehicle charging points and community energy infrastructure.

Working with local government: Working closer with Horsham Rural City Council was seen as an opportunity for the community. Suggestions included having regular round-table discussions between council representatives, residents and having a clear point of contact between the community and council and an opportunity to partner in the development of business accommodation in the NC² building

Building Traditional Owner partnerships: Opportunities to partner with local Traditional Owners to recognise and promote cultural heritage and opportunities for truth telling around Indigenous history were identified.

Heritage: The protection of European history and heritage within the township was seen as an opportunity, including listing culturally significant buildings and re-instating verandahs on shop fronts.



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